



A Notebook on William Shakespeare

Edith Sitwell

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This book may be described as Dame Edith Sitwell's personal notebook. It consists of essays on the subject of the general aspect of the plays—those great hymns to the principle and the glory of life, in which there are the same differences in nature, in matter, in light, in darkness, in movement, that we find in the universe, and in which the characters are so vast they seem each an element (Water, Hamlet; Air, Romeo and Juliet; Fire, King Lear) and which yet bear the stamp of our common humanity, made greater and more universal. There are long essays on *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*.

Dame Edith believes, with all humility, that she has discovered new sources of the inspiration of *King Lear*, throwing a new light on the whole play, and giving new meanings to the mad scenes, of an unsurpassable grandeur, depth, and terror. There are shorter essays also on other of the tragedies. The keynotes of many of the plays are examined (not all the plays are discussed), a phrase is studied and will be found to hold the whole meaning of the play. There are essays on many of the comedies, and long passages about the Fools and Clowns. Connecting levels are traced between the philosophies of the plays. There are, too, running commentaries on Shakespeare as that 'common-kissing Titan', and, since the audiobook is a personal notebook, the author makes copious quotations from the writings of Shakespearean scholars who have thrown light on the various aspects of which she treats, and from works on other subjects which also serve to illumine his mighty and many-sided genius.

Edith Sitwell (1887-1964) was born into an aristocratic family and, along with her brothers, Osbert and Sacheverell, had a significant impact on the artistic life of the 20s. She encountered the work of the French symbolists, Rimbaud in particular, early in her writing life and became a champion of the modernist movement, editing six editions of the controversial magazine *Wheels*. She remained a crusading force against philistinism and conservatism throughout her life and her legacy lies as much in her unstinting support of other artists as it does in her own poetry.

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